

said, "Uhhh," as his chin bounced off the table top.

Then Ellis disappeared, leaving Clete with the ladies, and their three-figure bar tab.

HOLY WATER BLUES

It was in the middle of the fund-raising pancake breakfast at St. James Catholic Church in Loma Alta, California, when Clete Johnson, sous chef in charge of mixing the batter, slipped on a grease spill on the floor and landed flat on his back and discovered a water spot on the ceiling that looked just like the Virgin. He called, from his prone position, to the head chef, Ellis Leahy, and told him that it was a miracle.

Ellis turned from the grill, a slice of hairy belly smiling out of the gap between his grease splattered t-shirt and grey slacks, and said, "Get up off your lazy ass and get that mixing bowl over here, Bozo!"

Ellis turned back to his pancakes and started flipping them, and Clete got up and dragged the twenty-gallon metal mixing bowl across the floor toward the grill. As he passed under the Virgin, a drop of shiny water broke away from her and fell into the middle of the fluffy white batter.

TEN THOUSAND INCAS LAUGH IN THEIR GRAVES

Ellis and Clete were headed to the beach in their brand new skin-tight Speedo swim suits: "Forget all about those damned boxer trunks," said Ellis, slipping his thumb under the waist band that clung to the southern hemisphere of his hairy beer belly. "The women love the tight ones." He pulled the elastic out and let it snap back on his taut skin. "They really like to be able to see the old equipment, know what I mean, partner?"

"Yes indeed," said Clete, looking down at the small bulge under the tight fabric in his crotch.

Ellis ran the yellow light at Loma Alta Boulevard and the Coast Route, then sped past the Whispering Palms Trailer Court and rumbled over the railroad tracks.

"And I didn't wanna say this, Clete," Ellis continued, "but your equipment's a little, shall we say, undersized."

"Huh?" said Clete.

Ellis found a meter that still had an hour on it and parked the Buick. Then, from under his seat, he pulled two potatoes. "But not to worry about your deficiency, my man," he said as he did a one-handed juggle with the two tubers. "I got us something to enhance our appeal."

Clete and Ellis set up camp: beach umbrella, beer cooler, lawn chairs, Cheetos, beach towels. And then, potatoes in place, they strutted for the ladies.

Ellis: stout and rotund and covered, front and back, with a pelt of curly black hair, his swimming trunks a skinny green strip under the globe of his belly. Clete: stick-thin and pot-bellied and hunch-shouldered, zinc oxide painted across his nose and cheeks like war paint, his Speedo pulled up to the equator of his paunch. And both of the men hung — albeit lumpily — like two stud gorillas.

After twenty minutes of advertising — stopping and posing for all the sun-bathing beauties in the vicinity, Ellis said, "Why don't we go take a dip and let the ladies fight for us here while we're gone. I swear to God, these bitches are droolin'."

"Did ya see the blonde smile at me, Ellis?" Clete sputtered. "The woman wants me; I can tell."

Two days earlier, a hurricane had boiled up off the coast of Peru. The resulting swells that rolled into California and culminated in crashing, churning, ten-foot breakers, tossed and turned Clete and Ellis like they were in a washing machine, sending the potatoes from front to back, around to the front again, and then back to the rear. Ellis' tuber lodged in the upper anterior quadrant of his left buttock, looking like a hard, irregular, ready-to-burst tumor that jiggled slightly as he strolled out of the water. Clete's rolled down south and stopped dead center to hang under the anus — a trapped bowel movement, solid and hard and heavy. The women on the beach, who had snickered and giggled as the guys showed off their equipment originally, laughed right out loud as the boys returned to base camp from the water, and they howled and screamed like chimpanzees when Ellis discovered the displacement of his prosthesis and — in a panicked rush, his fingers dancing like the tentacles of two electrocuted octopi — worked his potato back around to front and center.

THE BUDGET CUT

The budget cuts bumped Ellis Leahy out of his low-stress job and put him on the dole for six months. Then the dole went dry and Ellis went — reluctantly, and as a last